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SECRETARY MCKAY ANNOUNCES 1953 WATERFOWL HUNTING RULES

Basic regulations by flyways for the 1953-54 migratory waterfowl hunting season were announced today by Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay.

This portion of the overall structure of the annual regulations, as released today, specifies the length of the shooting seasons by flyways, bag and possession limits, and shooting hours, but does not include the specific season dates for the various States. These are to be selected by the States themselves within the framework of the period October 1 to January 10, 1954, based on the number of days allotted to their flyway, and will be published later. The States have the choice of a consecutive or a split season. This year those desiring the split season will be penalized only 10 percent instead of the previous 20 percent.

This innovation of signing into law the basic framework of regulations some 10 days to two weeks earlier than in previous years, as Secretary McKay pointed out, does away with the "period of secrecy" which formerly was a source of irritation to State game administrators while deliberating on their choice of season dates. Under this new system they have opportunity for free discussions, if they wish, in order to select the most advantageous dates for their States.

The amended regulations for the coming season were signed by the Secretary in accordance with a law of Congress making effective the treaties relating to birds migrating between the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

Secretary McKay emphasized that the basic data used to guide Fish and Wildlife Service officials in making their decisions resulted from cooperative wintering-ground surveys and surveys on the waterfowl breeding grounds made by Service biologists and game management agents, State game department technicians, Dominion and Provincial wildlife experts of Canada, and field personnel in Canada of Ducks Unlimited and the Wildlife Management Institute.

In the course of formulating regulations consideration was given also to the opinions and recommendations of the Director's Waterfowl Advisory Committee. This Committee is composed of delegates of the National Waterfowl Council and representatives of the National Audubon Society, the Outdoor Writers Association of America, the Izaak Walton League of America, the Wildlife Management Institute, the National Wildlife Federation, the Wildlife Society and the International Association of Game Fish and Conservation Commissioners.

Briefly stated by Secretary McKay, these are the highlights of the new regulations:

Atlantic Flyway: The States in this flyway--Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Vermont, Virginia, West

Virginia and Puerto Rico--will have the choice of 60 consecutive days or two periods of 27 days each. This is an increase of 5 days over last year. Field investigations indicate that the fall flight of ducks in this flyway will be better than in 1952.

It has been decided that the season for waterfowl shooting on Long Island shall be the same as in Connecticut.

Bag and possession limits on ducks remain the same as last year, 4 a day and 8 in possession. The bag and possession limits on geese (except snow geese) have been changed from 3 a day and 3 in possession to 2 and 4.

The woodcock season has been increased from 30 to 40 days, with the same bag and possession limits as in 1952 (4 and 8). This year Florida will have a season on this species.

Mississippi Flyway: The States in this flyway of Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Ohio, Tennessee, and Wisconsin will have the same length of season as last year--55 consecutive days or a split season of 25 days each. With the breeding population about the same and production slightly decreased in most of the more important areas, the forecast is for a reduced fall flight compared to 1952 but still well above the 5-year average.

Bag and possession limits for ducks and geese will be the same as last year--4 and 8 for ducks and 5 and 5 for geese.

The woodcock season will be 40 days with the same bag and possession limits as last year of 4 and 8.

Central Flyway: These States, which include Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Texas, and Wyoming, will have the same number of shooting days as last year--a 60-day straight season or two periods of 27 days. With the breeding populations about the same and production slightly decreased in most of the more important areas, the forecast is for a reduced fall flight compared to 1952 but above the average of recent years.

The same bag and possession limits for ducks and geese will prevail as in 1952--ducks 5 and 10, geese 5 and 5.

Woodcock shooting, permitted only in Oklahoma and eastern Texas, will have the same length of season (40 days), and the same bag and possession limits (4 and 8), as in the Atlantic and Mississippi Flyways.

Pacific Flyway: Arizona, California, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington in this flyway, will have a 75-day consecutive season or two split periods of 34 days each. This increase of 5 days over last year represents an attempt to alleviate an acute depredation problem on both grain-raising and grazing areas.

Bag and possession limits for ducks--which are the same in this flyway--have been increased from 6 to 7, plus 4 pintails or widgeons a day or in possession, singly or in combination.

Bag and possession limits for geese remain at 6 birds, but such limit shall not include more than 3 birds of the following dark species: common Canada, white-fronted, Tule, blue, or Emperor goose.

The bag and possession limits have been raised on coot from 15 to 25.

Hunting hours which will prevail in all flyways have been liberalized to allow shooting until sunset, instead of one hour before sunset as in recent years. The starting time of one-half hour before sunrise remains in effect. On the opening day of the season—including each first day of the split seasons—waterfowl and coot may not be hunted prior to 12 o'clock noon. Shooting hours for woodcock will be one-half hour before sunrise to sunset.

This year's regulations provide for a special nationwide experimental season on Wilson's snipe, or jacksnipe, of 15 days in all flyways, with bag and possession limits of 8 birds. The season on this species has been closed since 1941. The status of this bird is in a safe condition at the present time for such an experimental season. An extensive banding program will be carried on coincidentally with the shooting season in order to accumulate additional data.

The "no-baiting" regulation for the 1953 season has been modified to remove the controversial one-half mile clause. Essentially it retains all other provisions which existed in prior years.

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